

## **Rotating Extension Column**

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### **Big Crop of Pecans This Year**

While farmers in the Southeast experienced near record drought conditions and struggled with wilted field crops this summer, the pecan trees were loading up. A record, or near record yield is expected this year. Shellers in Georgia, a leading pecan producer, estimate that about 125 million pounds will be harvested and sold in that state.

Florida produces five to ten million pounds annually which is nowhere near Georgia, Texas and New Mexico, the major pecan producing states. That said, I am seeing large numbers of pecans being harvested in Santa Rosa County this fall.

There are only a few truly commercial pecan orchards in the area with sizeable acreage dedicated to serious production. Most local production comes from homeowners with trees in the landscape.

This has been such a good year that even people with a few often neglected trees are seeing high production. I am hearing of yields of over 100 pounds per adult tree.

So, what are those fortunate to have several pecan trees in their yard to do with all of those extra nuts? Well, after storing all that the family can use and sharing with friends, sell the rest for the best price that you can get.

Selling pecans can be a challenging task. The choices are: selling directly to consumers, selling at an “accumulator” buying point or selling at major markets. The latter is pretty much out of the question unless a person has thousands of pounds of graded, cleaned nuts that have been sorted by variety.

Selling directly at retail or near a retail price is the best option for growers with a few trees. Obviously, there is a limit in how many local customers are available and the price that they will pay.

A word to local consumers - This good pecan harvest provides an excellent opportunity to buy locally. You will find some growers selling on the roadside or from their home or farm. Enjoy these high quality pecans while you can and don't balk at the price if it is within reason. It might be several years before small scale growers have extra pecans to sell.

A second option is to sell excess pecans to an “accumulator.” This is a buyer who sets up at a central location and purchases pecans in smaller quantity than a large buyer.

These are then collected, sorted and placed in bulk containers to deliver to larger buyers.

Expect to receive a lower price per pound from an accumulator than if you were able to sell the pecans directly to consumers. Once pecans are delivered to this site, the buyer must quickly make a judgment as to quality, shell out percentage, cleanliness and other factors and then offer a price. Calculated into the price offered is the expense of weighing, cleaning, sorting, consolidating pecan types and transportation to the next level.

Why did trees produce so many pecans this year? First, it was a dry spring and summer with many days of low humidity. These conditions don't allow several leaf and shuck fungal organisms, particularly scab fungus, to reduce the crop. Second, pecan trees are alternate bearers – a high yield one year is followed by a low yield the next. This was an “on” year. And, though the weather was dry, we received enough rain late in the summer to enable the nuts to fill.

Such high yields tend to deplete, or sap the strength of pecan trees and they must then spend time recovering and preparing for the next crop. To ensure recovery and good production in the future, owners of trees should provide good maintenance.

There is plenty of information available for use in maintaining pecan trees. The University of Florida's publication, “The Pecan Tree” is a 17 page document that describes the management needed. To download and review or print this document, go to: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HS229> .

For more information or if you have a question, call Dan Mullins, Extension Commercial Horticulture Agent, The University of Florida/IFAS-Santa Rosa County Extension, at 850-623-3868, between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm weekdays. Hearing-impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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